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Message Text

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ORIGIN ARA-10

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APPROVED BY ARA/PAN:EJNADEAU
----------191426Z 085562 /45
O 191417Z MAY 77
FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY PANAMA IMMEDIATE

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS:PFOR, PN

SUBJECT: WASHINGTON POST STORY, MAY 19

1. HEREWITH IS TEXT OF STORY BY MARLISE SIMONS APPEARING IN TODAY'S WASHINGTON POST.

BEGIN QUOTE. PANAMA CITY, MAY 18. PANAMA'S STRONGMAN, BRIG. GEN. OMAR TORRIJOS HAS EMPHATICALLY DENIED A WASHINGTON POST REPORT QUOTING HIM AS SAYING THAT PANAMA COULD ACCEPT A FUTURE U.S. MILITARY ROLE IN GUARANTEEING THE NEUTRALITY OF THE CANAL ONCE IT PASSES INTO PANAMANIAN HANDS.

THIS STATEMENT WAS INTERPRETED AS INDICATING AN IMPORTANT SHIFT OF THE PANAMANIAN POSITION ON THE CRUCIAL NEUTRALITY ISSUE. IF IT BECAME PANAMA'S OFFICIAL NEGOTIATING POSITION IT WOULD HAVE A MAJOR IMPACT ON THE COURSE OF THE CURRENT TREATY TALKS IN WASHINGTON.

TORRIJOS WAS QUOTED AS BEING PREPARED TO ACCEPT THE PRINCIPLE THAT THE UNITED STATES COULD TAKE ACTION
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AGAINST A THIRD COUNTRY IF NECESSARY TO SAFEGUARD THE CANAL'S NEUTRALITY. ONE AMERICAN OFFICIAL CONNECTED WITH THE CANAL DISCUSSIONS CALLED THE STATEMENT A "REAL BREAKTHROUGH" IF TRUE.

THE DENIAL BY TORRIJOS DID NOT COME AS A SURPRISE TO DIPLOMATS HERE, WHO FELT THE GENERAL MAY HAVE REGRETTED

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DISCLOSING PREMATURELY HIS GOVERNMENT'S NEGOTIATING POSITION AND POSSIBLY EMBARRASSING SEVERAL LATIN AMERICAN GOVERNMENTS WHO HAD BEEN BACKING THE PANAMANIAN POSITION.

THE UNSIGNED ARTICLE QUOTED TORRIJOS, 40, AS SAYING HE HAD NOT RECEIVED ANY WASHINGTON POST REPORTER RECENTLY AND THAT HE DID NOT SAY ANYTHING OF WHAT APPEARED IN THE POST DISPATCH "NOT ONLY WITH REGARD TO PANAMA AND NEGOTIATIONS BUT ALSO IN REGARD TO REFERENCES TO OTHER LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES."

TORRIJOS ALSO REPORTEDLY SAID, "I AM VERY SURPRISED THAT A SERIOUS NEWSPAPER LIKE THE WASHINGTON POST COULD PUT IN MY MOUTH WHAT I HAVE NOT SAID."

THE WASHINGTON POST INTERVIEW IN QUESTION TOOK PLACE LAST WEEKEND AND WAS SPREAD OUT OVER THE THREE DAYS I SPENT WITH TORRIJOS. THE CONVERSATION -- LASTING SOME 40 HOURS ALTOGETHER -- BEGAN EARLY FRIDAY AS TORRIJOS RECEIVED A MEXICAN-BASED GROUP OF WOMEN JOURNALISTS FROM HALF A DOZEN NATIONS.

EACH JOURNALIST IN THE GROUP IDENTIFIED HERSELF BY NAME AND NEWSPAPER. I INTRODUCED MYSELF AS A DUTCH REPORTER WRITING BOTH FOR A DUTCH NEWSPAPER AND FOR THE WASHINGTON POST. MY RELATIONSHIP WITH THE WASHINGTON POST WAS MENTIONED ON FOUR SEPARATE OCCASIONS IN THE PRESENCE OF THE GENERAL AND SEVERAL OF HIS CLOSE AIDES.

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HIS INITIAL MEETING ON FRIDAY MORNING WITH THE MAIN GROUP LASTED FOUR HOURS BUT CONVERSATION WITH TORRIJOS AND A GROUP OF THREE REPORTERS CONTINUED UNTIL MONDAY MORNING. IT TOOK PLACE AT HIS HOME AT FARRALLON, ABOUT 100 MILES WEST OF PANAMA CITY AND DURING PLANE AND HELICOPTER RIDES AROUND THE COUNTRY. ON THIS TOUR, TORRIJOS INAUGURATED POTATO SILOS AT CERRO PUNTA AND TALKED TO A BANANA WORKERS UNION AT PUERTO ARMUELLES. WE ALSO MADE STOPOFFS AT THE TOWNS OF DAVID AND SANTIAGO.

MOST OF OUR TALKS, PARTICULARLY ON THE CANAL NEGOTIATIONS, WERE HEARD BY MYSELF AND TWO MEXICAN REPORTERS, NIDIA MARIN FROM EL UNIVERSAL AND PAZ MUNOZ OF EL DIA.

AWARE OF THE IMPORTANCE OF THE GENERAL'S VIEWS ON THE NEUTRALITY ISSUE, I RETURNED TO THE SUBJECT SEVERAL TIMES ON DIFFERENT DAYS TO AVOID ANY MISUNDERSTANDING. END QUOTE.

2. POST ALSO CARRIED HERBLOCK CARTOON DEPICTING "CAPITOL

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HILL JINGOES" MANNING SMALL CANNON AIMED AT SHIP NAMED "U.S. PANAMA NEGOTIATIONS". SHIP IS SHOWN TO BE ON THE ROCKS WITH A PERISCOPE AND MINE IN THE WATER. CAPTION READS "IF THEY THINK THE CANAL IS TOUGH, WAIT TILL THEY TRY COMING UP THE POTOMAC."

CHRISTOPHER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
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Control Number: n/a
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Sent Date: 19-May-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: n/a
Disposition Approved on Date:
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Disposition Comment:
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Disposition Event:
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Executive Order: N/A
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Original Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
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Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
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SAS ID: 2447630
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Subject: WASHINGTON POST STORY, MAY 19
TAGS: PFOR, EWWT, SOPN, PN, US
To: PANAMA
Type: TE
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